

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

LEE A. BARNES,

Petitioner,

Case No. 1:16-cv-92

v.

Honorable Robert Holmes Bell

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS,

Respondent.

_____ /

OPINION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner under 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Promptly after the filing of a petition for habeas corpus, the Court must undertake a preliminary review of the petition to determine whether “it plainly appears from the face of the petition and any exhibits annexed to it that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court.” Rule 4, RULES GOVERNING § 2254 CASES; *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If so, the petition must be summarily dismissed. Rule 4; *see Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (district court has the duty to “screen out” petitions that lack merit on their face). A dismissal under Rule 4 includes those petitions which raise legally frivolous claims, as well as those containing factual allegations that are palpably incredible or false. *Carson v. Burke*, 178 F.3d 434, 436-37 (6th Cir. 1999). After undertaking the review required by Rule 4, the Court will dismiss the petition without prejudice for failure to exhaust available state-court remedies.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Petitioner Lee A. Barnes presently is on parole from a prison sentence of one to twenty years, imposed on December 23, 2013 by the Kent County Circuit Court, after Petitioner pleaded guilty to possession with intent to deliver heroin, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 333.7401(2)(a)(iv). Petitioner filed a delayed application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Court of Appeals, raising two issues:

- I. Defendant-Appellant must be resentenced where he was assessed five points pursuant to OV 12 where the alleged contemporaneous felonious acts were not supported by the record.
- II. The trial court abused its discretion and violated Defendant-Appellant's state and federal constitutional due process guarantees when it denied his request to withdraw his no-contest plea of guilty before sentencing when Defendant-Appellant believed himself to be coerced into pleading guilty, and trial counsel was ineffective for refusing to motion the trial court for reconsideration, for refusing to file an interlocutory appeal with the Court of Appeals, or for failing to attempt to negotiate a conditional plea after Defendant-Appellant's motion to suppress was denied.

(ECF No. 1-1, PageID.25.) The court of appeals denied leave to appeal on July 28, 2014. Petitioner sought leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court, raising the same two grounds, as well as a claim of ineffective assistance of trial and appellate counsel, which he describes as follows:

Defense attorney refused to advocate and omitted to raise key issues such as motion to suppress evidence, Confrontation Clause, illegal search and seizure both vehicle and apartment. Also the appellate attorney omitted to raise the Confrontation Clause of the Sixth Amendment.

(ECF No. 6, PageID.93.) The supreme court denied leave to appeal on October 28, 2015.

Petitioner filed his habeas application in this Court on or about January 11, 2016.¹

In his amended application, Petitioner raises the two issues presented in his application for leave to appeal to both Michigan appellate courts (which he collects into a single habeas ground), as well as the claim of ineffective assistance of trial and appellate counsel that he presented for the first time in the Michigan Supreme Court.

II. Exhaustion of State Court Remedies

Before the Court may grant habeas relief to a state prisoner, the prisoner must exhaust remedies available in the state courts. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1); *O'Sullivan v. Boerckel*, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999). Exhaustion requires a petitioner to “fairly present” federal claims so that state courts have a “fair opportunity” to apply controlling legal principles to the facts bearing upon a petitioner’s constitutional claim. *See O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 842; *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 275-77 (1971), *cited in Duncan v. Henry*, 513 U.S. 364, 365 (1995), and *Anderson v. Harless*, 459 U.S. 4, 6 (1982). To fulfill the exhaustion requirement, a petitioner must have fairly presented his federal claims to all levels of the state appellate system, including the state’s highest court. *Duncan*, 513 U.S. at 365-66; *Wagner v. Smith*, 581 F.3d 410, 414 (6th Cir. 2009); *Hafley v. Sowders*, 902 F.2d 480, 483 (6th Cir. 1990). “[S]tate prisoners must give the state courts one full opportunity to resolve any constitutional issues by invoking one complete round of the State’s established appellate review process.” *O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 845. The district court can and must raise the exhaustion issue

¹Under Sixth Circuit precedent, the application is deemed filed when handed to prison authorities for mailing to the federal court. *Cook v. Stegall*, 295 F.3d 517, 521 (6th Cir. 2002). Petitioner dated his application on January 11, 2016, and it was received by the Court on January 27, 2016. Thus, it must have been handed to prison officials for mailing at some time between January 11 and 27, 2016. For purposes of this opinion, the Court has given Petitioner the benefit of the earliest possible filing date. *See Brand v. Motley*, 526 F.3d 921, 925 (6th Cir. 2008) (holding that the date the prisoner signs the document is deemed under Sixth Circuit law to be the date of handing to officials) (citing *Goins v. Saunders*, 206 F. App’x 497, 498 n.1 (6th Cir. 2006)).

sua sponte when it clearly appears that habeas claims have not been presented to the state courts. *See Prather v. Rees*, 822 F.2d 1418, 1422 (6th Cir. 1987); *Allen*, 424 F.2d at 138-39.

Petitioner bears the burden of showing exhaustion. *See Rust v. Zent*, 17 F.3d 155, 160 (6th Cir. 1994). According to the amended petition, Petitioner presented all of the issues that he collects under his first ground for habeas relief to both the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court. Petitioner acknowledges, however, that he raised his claim of ineffective assistance of trial and appellate counsel for the first time in his application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Presentation of an issue for the first time on discretionary review to the state supreme court does not fulfill the requirement of “fair presentation.” *Castille v. Peoples*, 489 U.S. 346, 351 (1989). Applying *Castille*, the Sixth Circuit repeatedly has recognized that a habeas petitioner does not comply with the exhaustion requirement when he fails to raise a claim in the state court of appeals, but raises it for the first time on discretionary appeal to the state’s highest court. *See, e.g., Skinner v. McLemore*, 425 F. App’x 491, 494 (6th Cir. 2011); *Thompson v. Bell*, 580 F.3d 423, 438 (6th Cir. 2009); *Warlick v. Romanowski*, 367 F. App’x 634, 643 (6th Cir. 2010); *Granger v. Hurt*, 215 F. App’x 485, 491 (6th Cir. 2007). Unless the state supreme court actually grants leave to appeal and reviews the issue, it remains unexhausted in the state courts. Petitioner’s application for leave to appeal was denied, and, thus, the issue was not reviewed.

An applicant has not exhausted available state remedies if he has the right under state law to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(c). Petitioner has at least one available procedure by which to raise the issues he has presented in this application. He may file a motion for relief from judgment under MICH. CT. R. 6.500 *et seq.* Under Michigan law,

one such motion may be filed after August 1, 1995. MICH. CT. R. 6.502(G)(1). Petitioner has not yet filed his one allotted motion. Therefore, the Court concludes that he has at least one available state remedy. In order to properly exhaust his claim, Petitioner must file a motion for relief from judgment in the Kent County Circuit Court. If his motion is denied by the circuit court, Petitioner must appeal that decision to the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court. *See Duncan*, 513 U.S. at 365-66.

Because Petitioner has some claims that are exhausted and some that are not, his petition is “mixed.” Under *Rose v. Lundy*, 455 U.S. 509, 522 (1982), district courts are directed to dismiss mixed petitions without prejudice in order to allow petitioners to return to state court to exhaust remedies. However, since the habeas statute was amended to impose a one-year statute of limitations on habeas claims, *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1), dismissal without prejudice often effectively precludes future federal habeas review. This is particularly true after the Supreme Court ruled in *Duncan v. Walker*, 533 U.S. 167, 181-82 (2001), that the limitations period is not tolled during the pendency of a federal habeas petition. As a result, the Sixth Circuit adopted a stay-and-abeyance procedure to be applied to mixed petitions. *See Palmer v. Carlton*, 276 F.3d 777, 781 (6th Cir. 2002). In *Palmer*, the Sixth Circuit held that when the dismissal of a mixed petition could jeopardize the timeliness of a subsequent petition, the district court should dismiss only the unexhausted claims and stay further proceedings on the remaining portion until the petitioner has exhausted his claims in the state court. *Id.*; *see also Rhines v. Weber*, 544 U.S. 269, 277 (2007) (approving stay-and-abeyance procedure); *Griffin v. Rogers*, 308 F.3d 647, 652 n.1 (6th Cir. 2002).

Petitioner’s application is subject to the one-year statute of limitations provided in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1). Under § 2244(d)(1)(A), the one-year limitations period runs from “the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time

for seeking such review.” Petitioner appealed his conviction to the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court. The Michigan Supreme Court denied his application on October 28, 2015. Petitioner did not petition for certiorari to the United States Supreme Court, though the ninety-day period in which he could have sought review in the United States Supreme Court is counted under § 2244(d)(1)(A). *See Bronaugh v. Ohio*, 235 F.3d 280, 283 (6th Cir. 2000). The ninety-day period expired on January 27, 2016. Accordingly, absent tolling, Petitioner would have one year, or until January 27, 2017, in which to file his habeas petition.

The *Palmer* Court has indicated that thirty days is a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to file a motion for post-conviction relief in state court, and another thirty days is a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to return to federal court after he has exhausted his state-court remedies. *Palmer*, 276 F.3d at 781. *See also Griffin*, 308 F.3d at 653 (holding that sixty days amounts to a mandatory period of equitable tolling under *Palmer*).² Petitioner has more than sixty days remaining in his limitations period. Assuming that Petitioner diligently pursues his state-court remedies and promptly returns to this Court after the Michigan Supreme Court issues its decision, he is not in danger of running afoul of the statute of limitations. Therefore a stay of these proceedings is not warranted. Should Petitioner decide not to pursue his unexhausted claims in the state courts, he may file a new petition raising only exhausted claims at any time before the expiration of the limitations period.

²The running of the statute of limitations is tolled while “a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2).

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, the Court will dismiss the petition for failure to exhaust available state-court remedies.

Certificate of Appealability

Under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2), the Court must determine whether a certificate of appealability should be granted. A certificate should issue if Petitioner has demonstrated a “substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right.” 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). This Court’s dismissal of Petitioner’s action under Rule 4 of the Rules Governing § 2254 Cases is a determination that the habeas action, on its face, lacks sufficient merit to warrant service. It would be highly unlikely for this Court to grant a certificate, thus indicating to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals that an issue merits review, when the Court already has determined that the action is so lacking in merit that service is not warranted. *See Love v. Butler*, 952 F.2d 10 (1st Cir. 1991) (it is “somewhat anomalous” for the court to summarily dismiss under Rule 4 and grant a certificate); *Hendricks v. Vasquez*, 908 F.2d 490 (9th Cir. 1990) (requiring reversal where court summarily dismissed under Rule 4 but granted certificate); *Dory v. Comm’r of Corr.*, 865 F.2d 44, 46 (2d Cir. 1989) (it was “intrinsically contradictory” to grant a certificate when habeas action does not warrant service under Rule 4); *Williams v. Kullman*, 722 F.2d 1048, 1050 n.1 (2d Cir. 1983) (issuing certificate would be inconsistent with a summary dismissal).

The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has disapproved the issuance of blanket denials of a certificate of appealability. *Murphy v. Ohio*, 263 F.3d 466 (6th Cir. 2001). Rather, the district court must “engage in a reasoned assessment of each claim” to determine whether a certificate is warranted. *Id.* at 467. Each issue must be considered under the standards set forth by the Supreme

Court in *Slack v. McDaniel*, 529 U.S. 473 (2000). *Murphy*, 263 F.3d at 467. Consequently, this Court has examined each of Petitioner's claims under the *Slack* standard.

This Court denied Petitioner's application on the procedural ground of lack of exhaustion. Under *Slack*, 529 U.S. at 484, when a habeas petition is denied on procedural grounds, a certificate of appealability may issue only "when the prisoner shows, at least, [1] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right and [2] that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling." Both showings must be made to warrant the grant of a certificate. *Id.* The Court finds that reasonable jurists could not debate that this Court correctly dismissed the petition on the procedural ground of lack of exhaustion. "Where a plain procedural bar is present and the district court is correct to invoke it to dispose of the case, a reasonable jurist could not conclude either that the district court erred in dismissing the petition or that the petitioner should be allowed to proceed further." *Id.* Therefore, the Court denies Petitioner a certificate of appealability.

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: March 23, 2016

/s/ Robert Holmes Bell
ROBERT HOLMES BELL
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE